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ABSTRACT

This research update uses the U.S. Department of Education's National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty to analyze faculty retirement and its effects. It presents data regarding retirement and institution type, field of teaching, gender, union status, plans for retirement, and faculty relocation. It concludes that pending retirement does not appear to pose a threat of an overwhelming loss of talent in higher education, although the loss will be more noticeable in some fields and institutions. (EV)

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NEA Higher Education Research Center Update

Faculty Retirement: Loss or Opportunity?

By Suzanne Clery, John Lee

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Update

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Faculty Retirement: Loss or Opportunity?

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, some observers of the higher education scene have predicted a pending loss of faculty as the 1960s faculty hired to teach the baby boom generation reaches retirement age. The facts suggest that retirement does not loom as a major loss of teaching talent.

In the fall of 1999, the U.S. Department of Education undertook the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:99) of college and university faculty members. The result of this effort provides the basis for this analysis. Full-time faculty members whose principal job is teaching for-credit courses and who have faculty status are included in this analysis; teaching assistants, part-time faculty or other institutional employees without faculty status are excluded.

INSTITUTION TYPE

Sixteen percent of full-time higher education faculty members will be coming of retirement age within the next several years (Table 1). Forty percent of them state they are very likely to retire in the next three years. The potential retirement pool is largest in public 4-year institutions and smallest in public 2-year colleges.

Eighteen percent of faculty members in public 4-year institutions are 60 years or older, as are 12 percent of those in public 2-year, and 17 percent of faculty members in private, not-for-profit institutions.

In public 4-year institutions, 42 percent of faculty members aged 60 or older stated they were very likely to retire in the next three years, as did 45 percent of those in public 2-year institutions. However, only 34 percent of those aged 60 or older in independent colleges and universities replied they were likely to retire in next three years. On the other hand, 28 and 30 percent of those in public 4- and 2-year institutions, respectively, replied that they were not at all likely to retire in the next three years, compared with 41 percent of those in private, not-for-profit institutions.

FIELD OF TEACHING

By academic field, natural sciences, education and humanities employ the largest share of faculty members 60 years or older, about 20 percent (Table 2). Business and health sciences employ the lowest percent of faculty members aged 60 or more, 13 and 11 percent, respectively.

Overall, 40 percent of faculty age 60 or more stated it is very

Table 1

Percentage of full-time faculty members that are 60 years or older and percentage distribution of full-time faculty according to likelihood of retirement in the next three years, by type of institution: 1999

		How likely to retire-those 60 or older		
	60 years or older	Not at all likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
TOTAL	16.2	31.8	28.0	40.3
Institutional type				
Public 4-year	18.2	27.5	30.2	42.3
Public 2-year	11.9	29.7	25.8	44.5
Private, not-for-profit	16.5	40.6	25.2	34.1

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, 1999 (NSOPF:99) Data Analysis System, Washington, DC, 2001.

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likely they will retire in the next three years, and an additional 28 percent reported that it is somewhat likely that they will retire. However, faculty members in some fields were more likely to state they will retire in the next few years than others. At the top end, 52 percent of the education faculty aged 60 or older planned to retire in the next few years, as did 45 percent of the faculty members in natural sciences. At the low end of the distribution, 28 percent of those in social sciences and 35 percent of engineering faculty aged 60 years or older planned to retire in the next three years.

Thus, education and natural sciences departments, given their higher proportions of older faculty, and their higher rate of faculty likely to retire in the next three years, will experience greater losses of seasoned faculty members than other departments. On the other hand, social science departments will experience a lower loss of older faculty members.

GENDER

Men will retire at a greater rate than women over the next few years because twice as many men in academe are 60 years or older than women, 20 percent compared with 10 percent (Table 3). Men and women aged 60 or older expect to retire in the next three years at approximately the same rate, about 40 percent.

UNION STATUS

The percentage of faculty members aged 60 or older who plan to retire in the next three years was approximately the same for faculty members who are union members compared with those who are not (Table 4). However, union members were less likely to state that they would have a different job within the next three years, 41 percent, compared with those who are not union members, 53 percent.

Table 2

Percentage of full-time faculty members that are 60 years or older and percentage distribution of full-time faculty according to likelihood of retirement in the next three years, by principal field of teaching: 1999

		How likely to retire-those 60 or older		
	60 years or older	Not at all likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
TOTAL	16.2	31.8	28.0	40.3
Principal field of teaching				
Natural sciences	19.5	27.4	27.2	45.3
Education	18.5	15.7	32.2	52.1
Humanities	18.5	39.8	21.8	38.4
Engineering	17.5	22.9	42.1	35.1
Social sciences	15.6	37.0	35.5	27.5
All other	14.8	33.0	28.4	38.6
Fine arts	13.8	45.1	17.1	37.8
Business	12.9	29.8	29.4	40.8
Health sciences	11.0	28.3	29.8	41.9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, 1999 (NSOPF:99) Data Analysis System, Washington, DC, 2001.

Table 3

Percentage of full-time faculty members that are 60 years or older and percentage distribution of full-time faculty according to likelihood of retirement in the next three years, by gender:1999

		How likely to retire-those 60 or older		
	60 years or older	Not at all likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
TOTAL	16.2	31.8	28.0	40.3
Gender				
Men	20.0	31.3	27.9	40.8
Women	10.0	33.2	28.4	38.4

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, 1999 (NSOPF:99) Data Analysis System, Washington, DC, 2001.

PLANS FOR RETIREMENT

Some faculty members expressed interest in taking early retirement, while others responded they would like to retire, but work part-time at their institution. Some faculty members who teach part- or full-time previously retired from another occupation or

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another college. Further, faculty members differ regarding the age they plan to retire from all paid work.

Fifty-eight percent of full-time faculty members in public 4-year institutions responded they were likely to retire and work part-time at their institution, which was less than the 68 and 64 percent in public 2-year and private, not-for-profit institutions respectively (Table 5).

About 20 percent of part-time male faculty members responded they had retired from another position, as had 10 percent of their female counterparts. The same relationship holds true for full-time faculty members: 5 percent of full-time male faculty members have retired from another position, while one-half as many, 2.5 percent, of females have retired.

When asked if they would take early retirement, 44 percent of part-time faculty in public 4-year institutions responded they would, compared with 36 percent of those in community colleges. Among those teaching full-time, the reverse was true: 49 percent of faculty members in public 4-year institutions answered in the affirmative, compared with 56 percent of those in public 2-year institutions. Comparatively less, 40 percent of those in private, not-for-profit institutions, answered they would accept early retirement. Planned retire-

Table 4

Percentage of full-time faculty members that are 60 years or older, percentage distribution of full-time faculty according to likelihood of retirement in the next three years and percentage that are likely to have a different job in the next three years, by union status: 1999

		How likely to retire-those 60 or older			
	60 years or older	Not at all likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Likely to have a different job*
TOTAL	16.2	31.8	28.0	40.3	49.9
Union status					
Union member	16.3	34.0	25.5	40.5	40.6
Not a union member	16.2	31.0	28.8	40.2	52.9

*Includes only those full-time faculty members who stated they were not likely to retire in the next 3 years

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, 1999 (NSOPF:99) Data Analysis System, Washington, DC, 2001.

Table 5

Percentage of faculty responding "yes" to selected questions regarding retirement, and average age to retire according to employment status, by selected characteristics: 1999

	Would retire and work part-time at institution		Have retired from another position		Would take early retirement		Age to retire from all paid employment	
	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time
TOTAL	78.0	62.1	14.8	3.8	39.6	47.9	66.3	65.8
Institutional type								
Public 4-year	75.4	58.2	14.0	3.0	44.1	48.7	66.3	66.0
Public 2-year	78.1	67.8	14.6	4.2	36.2	56.4	65.8	64.6
Private, not-for-profit	80.2	63.9	15.9	4.7	40.1	39.9	66.9	66.5
Gender								
Male	79.4	61.4	19.2	4.6	39.5	47.0	66.9	66.0
Female	76.3	63.4	10.0	5.2	39.6	49.7	65.6	65.5
Union status								
Union member	79.7	62.1	14.8	2.7	40.2	53.0	67.2	65.8
Not a union member	77.7	62.2	14.8	4.1	39.4	46.1	66.7	66.3

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, 1999 (NSOPF:99) Data Analysis System, Washington, DC, 2001.

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ment ages differed according to institutional type. Full-time faculty members in public 2-year institutions plan to retire at age 64.6, compared with 66.0 for those in public 4-year institutions, while those in private, not-for-profit institutions plan to wait to retire until age 66.5.

Union members responded they would retire early more often than those not in unions, 53 compared with 46 percent. Union members teaching full-time also plan to retire at a slightly younger age than those not in unions, 65.8 and 66.3 respectively.

FACULTY MOVING ON

In addition to institutions losing faculty members to retirement, loss will also be experienced due to faculty members accepting other positions, both in and out of higher education. Twenty-three percent of full-time faculty members who do not expect to retire in the next three years stated that they were likely to accept full-time non-postsecondary jobs in the next three years (Table 6). Forty-one percent of full-time faculty members stated they were likely to accept a full-time faculty position at a different institution. Overall, 50 percent of those not expecting to retire in the next few years stated they were likely to accept a position in any industry, including higher education.

Table 6

Among those who stated it was not likely they would retire in the next 3 years,percentage distribution of full-time faculty and likeliness of accepting a job in three years by type of job: 1999

	Not likely	Likely
How likely accept full-time non-postsecondary job in 3 years	77.5	22.5
How likely accept part-time non-postsecondary job in 3 years	90.7	9.3
How likely accept full-time postsecondary job in 3 years	58.8	41.2
How likely accept part-time postsecondary job in 3 years	89.9	10.1

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, 1999 (NSOPF 99) Data Analysis System, Washington, DC, 2001.

The loss of faculty to other industries and the movement of faculty between institutions accounts for greater loss of faculty members than retirement.

CONCLUSION

Pending retirement does not appear to pose the threat of an overwhelming loss of talent in higher education, although the loss will be more noticeable in some fields and some institutions. A manageable share of faculty members will leave over the next few years. Faculty members are more likely to leave their current teaching job for reasons other than retirement. This, in combination with expected enrollment increases over the next few years, will provide new opportunities for young faculty members entering the profession.

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